

4550 Children Missing from Care

Children missing from care are at great risk for victimization and exploitation. Many children do not perceive the inherent risks or see themselves as potential victims. When a child leaves care on his/her own, it may be done as a coping mechanism and perceived by him/her as the only option to solve a problem or address concerns/needs.

Because of possible dangers to a child, social workers and caregivers must consider a child missing from care as a major event that requires intensive and ongoing intervention. When a child is missing from care, social workers will ensure that timely reports are made to appropriate authorities and take action to locate the child and return him/her to an approved and appropriate placement.

When a child returns to care, social workers and caregivers should support the child to remain in care and involve the child when reviewing the case plan to ensure that the child's needs are adequately addressed and that the child has confidence about her or his future.

45501 Definitions

"Missing" child means any child up to 18 years of age for whom Children's Administration (CA) has custody and control (not including children in dependency guardianships) and:

- The child's whereabouts are unknown; and/or
- The child has left care without the permission of the child's caregiver or CA.

Children who are missing are categorized under one of the following definitions:

- A. **"Taken From Placement"** means that a child's whereabouts are unknown, and it is believed that the child is being or has been concealed, detained or removed by another person from a court-ordered placement and the removal, concealment or detainment is in violation of the court order.
- B. **"Absence Not Authorized, Whereabouts Unknown"** means the child is not believed to have been taken from placement, did not have permission to leave the placement, and there has been no contact with the child and the whereabouts of the child are unknown.
- C. **"Absence Not Authorized, Whereabouts Known"** means that a child has left his or her placement without permission and the social worker has some contact with the child or may periodically have information as to the whereabouts of the child.

45502 Reporting Children Missing from Care

A. Required Timeframes for Reporting Children Missing from Care

Licensed caregivers, including foster parents, licensed relative caregivers and private agencies providing placement services, are required by WAC 388-148-0123 to report to the assigned CA social worker AND law enforcement when a child is missing from their care.

Unlicensed relative caregivers providing placement services are also required to report to the assigned CA social worker AND law enforcement when a child is missing from their care.

Both licensed and unlicensed caregivers are required to report the child missing from their care within the timeframes outlined below (A.(1)(a-h) and (2)).

1. Once notified that a child is missing from care, the assigned social worker must work with the caregiver to ensure that law enforcement is notified immediately when a child is missing from care and one or more of the following applies:
 - a. The child has been, or is believed to have been, taken from placement as defined above.
 - b. The child has been or is believed to have been lured from placement or to have left placement under circumstances that indicate the child may be at risk of physical or sexual assault or exploitation.
 - c. The child is age 13 or younger.
 - d. The child has one or more physical or mental health conditions that if not treated daily will place the child at severe risks.
 - e. The child is pregnant or parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with him or her.
 - f. The child has severe emotional problems (.e.g., suicidal ideations) that if not treated will place the child at severe risk.
 - g. The child has a developmental disability that impairs the child's ability to care for him/herself.
 - h. The child has a serious alcohol and/or substance abuse problem.
 - i. The child is at risk due to circumstances unique to that child.

2. If one or more of the items listed above (a-i) does not apply to the child missing from care, the assigned social worker must work with the caregiver to ensure that local law enforcement is contacted within six hours.

If the child leaves school or has an unauthorized absence from school (and none of the factors listed in a-i apply), the CA social worker and caregiver should consult with one another to assess the situation and determine when it is appropriate to bring the situation to the attention of law enforcement.

If the child does not return at the end of the school day, the caregiver and the social worker may decide to temporarily delay notification to law enforcement for up to 4 hours after the end of the school day. This decision must be made based on the individual case situation, in some situations it may be appropriate to provide the additional time to give the child the opportunity to return on their own.

B. Information Required to Report to Law Enforcement

1. The assigned social worker must ensure that the caregiver provides as much of the following information as is known, to law enforcement and to CA:
 - a. Name and basic demographic information of the child;
 - b. When the child left;
 - c. Where the child left from;
 - d. What the child was wearing;
 - e. Any known behaviors or interactions that may have precipitated the child's departure;
 - f. Any possible places the child may go;
 - g. Any special physical or mental health conditions or medications that may affect the child's safety;
 - h. Any known companions who may be aware of and involved in the child's absence;
 - i. Other professionals, relatives, significant adults or peers who may know where the child might go; and,
 - j. A recent photo of the child.

C. Reporting Requirements When a Child is Missing from Care

1. Notification to the Assigned Social Worker when a Child is Missing from Care

When a child is missing from care the assigned social worker will be made aware of the situation in one the following ways:

- a. The caregiver notifies the assigned social worker by telephone that the child is missing from care. The caregiver is required to notify the social worker directly or make the report to CA intake if the social worker cannot be reached directly; or
- b. CA Intake completes a SER and notifies the assigned social worker and their supervisor (i.e. verbally or by e-mail) that a report of a missing child has come through CA intake; or
- c. The assigned social worker's supervisor notifies the assigned social worker, if CA intake was unable to make direct contact with the social worker.

2. Assigned Social Worker - Requirements for Reporting

- a. When the assigned social worker learns of a child missing from care, the social worker must immediately:
 - i. Confirm the child's current status with the caregiver;
 - ii. Confirm that the caregiver has reported the child's absence to law enforcement as required in items A (1&2) and B above. If law enforcement has not been informed the social worker will ensure that all required reports are made and in compliance with items A (1&2) and B above; and
 - iii. Obtain the runaway report number once the information has been provided to law enforcement and the Washington State Patrol (WSP) Missing Children Clearinghouse and document the number in an SER.

Washington State Patrol Missing Children Clearinghouse PO Box 2347 Building 17 Airdustrial Way Olympia WA 98507-2347	Business Hours M-F 8:00-5:00 Voice Mail available after hours (360) 586-0030 800 543-5678 (360) 704-2404 fax
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- iv. Complete an SER about the child's missing status and any other known information as listed in Section B above.
- v. Notify the child's legal parent and maintain communication with the parent during the child's absence, unless immediate contact with the legal parent would compromise the child's safety. If safety is a consideration, the social worker will notify the child's legal parent of the child's absence within 24 hours.

- b. The social worker will consult with the AAG regarding possible legal options. Depending on the youth's legal status and the specific court order, possible legal actions may include:
 - i. Filing a motion with the court and requesting legal intervention; or
 - ii. Notifying the court of the youth's status of missing from placement without permission.
 - c. The social worker must notify other critical persons in the child's life, including the child's attorney, CASA/GAL, counselor, by the next business day.
 - d. The social worker will notify the child's school of the child's unauthorized absence from care, by the next school day.
3. Intake - Requirements for Reporting

Upon receiving a report of a child missing from care, the Intake worker must immediately:

- a. Complete an SER and notify the child's assigned social worker and the worker's supervisor, verbally or via e-mail, of the child's absence and any subsequent information received regarding the child.
- b. Confirm the assigned social work or the supervisor received the notification of the missing child, and document this confirmation in an SER.

If the CA intake worker is unable to provide immediate notification and/or confirm that the assigned social worker or supervisor received the notification within one business day, the CA intake worker must:

- a. *provide this information to the Area Administrator; and*
- b. *document confirmation of the notification of the AA in an SER.*

D. Regional and Headquarter Responsibilities Regarding Children Missing Care

2. Regional Responsibilities

CA Regions will maintain local office protocols for reporting missing children to local law enforcement. Generally, the protocol will include the issuance of a pickup order.

CA Regional management will review the list of their missing children, and the adequacy of the strategies being pursued to find them, on a monthly basis. Regional reports regarding the missing children and search strategies will be updated monthly.

3. Headquarters Field Operations

The Field Operations Division will monitor the regional reports regarding missing children and the search strategies used.

45504 Searching for Children Missing from Care

1. Social Worker Requirements for Searching for Children Missing from Care
When searching for children missing from care, the assigned social worker is required to:
 - a. Develop and implement strategies for actively searching for a child reported missing from care, in consultation with his/her supervisor. Guidelines on Searching for Missing Children should be considered when developing search strategies.
 - b. Contact professionals and other persons involved in the child's life, (e.g., local treatment team members, family, and friends) to enlist their involvement in a "missing from care" staffing. This staffing must occur within three (3) business days of the youth leaving care. The staffing may be conducted in one of the following ways:
 - i. In person or by phone; or
 - ii. Via Family Team Decision Making meetings, where available;
 - c. Complete the Missing Child Staffing Checklist (DSHS Form 15-308) to document meetings and contacts made regarding the missing child and search strategies developed.
 - d. Review the Missing Child Staffing Checklist weekly with the supervisor for the first month that the child is missing from care to update the supervisor on contacts made, information received and to develop and revise search strategies. Document these staffings in an SER. After the first 30 days the child is missing, review progress and changes with the supervisor monthly.
 - e. Contact the caregiver to discuss whether the placement will be available to the youth upon his/her return. If the caregiver will not be a placement option, identify other preliminary placement options for the child's return.
2. Supervisor Requirements for Searching for Children Missing from Care
The supervisor will document the status of the search process in an SER in the supervisory review section of CAMIS.

45505 Return of Children Missing from Care

1. Social Worker Requirements When a Child Missing from Care Returns
When a child is located or returns to care, the social worker will:
 - a. Notify law enforcement and the Missing Children Clearinghouse immediately and request that the pick up order be cancelled.

- b. Notify the child's legal parent and caregiver immediately.
 - c. Notify any other individuals or agencies that were contacted after the child was reported missing, including the child's attorney, CASA/GAL, other professionals and the child's school by the following business day after a child is located or returns to care.
 - d. Make certain a face-to-face debriefing is conducted with the child, within two (2) business days after the child is located or returns to care from an absence without authorization. Provide the child the option of meeting with the social worker, the caregiver, a neutral facilitator or another appropriate professional.
 - e. Complete the Returning to Care De-briefing Form (DSHS form 15-309). If a person other than the child's assigned social worker is conducting the face to face debriefing, the assigned social worker is responsible for ensuring that the person completes the Returning Child De-briefing Form and returns it to the child's social worker. The completed De-briefing form is then placed in the case file and the social worker documents in an SER the efforts made to resolve issues raised during the interview.
 - f. Work with the child to get appropriate medical treatment as soon as possible if, at any time after the child returns to care, the child discloses he/she has been ill, malnourished, sexually active, physically or sexually assaulted or exposed to other harmful conditions (e.g. methamphetamine production). The assigned social worker will report any allegations of child abuse or neglect to CA intake as outlined in RCW 26.44.030.
 - g. Collaborate with the child to identify the need for any other medical exams, mental health services, substance abuse treatment or other supports.
 - h. Provide the child with information from the National Runaway Hotline or other relevant resources.
 - i. Collaborate with the child to develop a plan to address the child's safety, placement stability and service needs.
 - j. Update the child's placement status in CAMIS.
 - k. Place a current photograph in the child's case file.
2. The social worker will convene a meeting with the child within three (3) business days after a child returns to care to discuss the child's needs and placement options and other resources to support the child. When appropriate, the social worker may also invite the child's caregiver, parents, siblings, other relatives and other professionals to the meeting with the child.

Youth who return to care must be given the opportunity to invite people who can provide support during this planning process.

If the youth is likely to leave again without authorization, service and treatment planning should address:

- a. The individual needs of the youth that lead to running behavior; and
- b. Placement options in the event of another absence.

45503 Documenting Children Missing from Care

1. Documentation requirements for the assigned social worker

Upon learning of the child's missing status, the assigned social worker will immediately:

- a. Document in an SER that the child is missing from care and include any other known information as outlined in *45502 Reporting Children Missing from Care – Section B – Information Required to Report to Law Enforcement*.
- b. Document the WSP missing persons report number in an SER.
- c. Identify the placement event in CAMIS as "on the run".
- d. Notify his/her supervisor and document in an SER when and how the supervisor was notified.
- e. Document staffings with the supervisor to review the Missing Child Staffing Checklist in an SER.
- f. Document any contact with a missing child in an SER, and other contact disclosing critical information related to the child's health, safety or whereabouts and any follow-up action taken.
- g. Document efforts made to resolve issues raised during the de-briefing interview with the child who has returned to care.
- h. Update the child's placement status in CAMIS when the child has returned to care.

2. Documentation requirements for the Supervisor

The supervisor must document in an SER the review and approval of the Missing Child Staffing Check List.